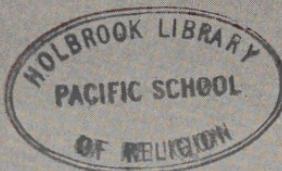


social action

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WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE FARMER?

LAUREN K. SOTH • WALTER W. WILCOX • VICTOR
OBENHAUS • J. STUART RUSSELL • SHIRLEY E. GREENE

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February, 1959

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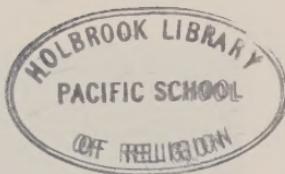


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editorial



A CONSULTATION ON THE CHURCH AND THE FARM PROBLEM
brought together fifty-five leaders of Congregational Christian and Evangelical and Reformed churches. The Consultation, held in Des Moines, Iowa, on November 10 and 11, 1958, was sponsored by the Council for Christian Social Action.

"A Message to the Churches" from the Consultation expressed the conviction that:

God, who is revealed in Jesus Christ as the Lord of life, is concerned for the physical, economic, and social well-being of all who till the soil as he is for all his children; and that he requires his followers to strive for equity and justice to agriculture and within agriculture.

The Consultation discussed the major problems which confront farmers today: low incomes, which place the standard of living for the average farmer far below that of other workers, even when allowance is made for food and fuel produced on the farm; subsistence living for about half of all agricultural workers whose productivity is low; and mounting surpluses of agricultural products which cannot be sold in a poverty-stricken world, despite widespread hunger.

The Consultation called upon churchmen "to undertake a thorough-going study of the farm problem" and expressed the hope that such study would enable them "to play a more understanding and ethically sensitive role in the formulation of a constructive policy for American agriculture."

This issue of **SOCIAL ACTION** presents the highlights of three addresses given at the Des Moines meeting and offers suggestions to churches and community groups which should lead to more understanding of what is happening to the farmer.



What is happening

It is important for churchmen to understand the problems farmers face. They need to see how the income of farmers compares with that of other workers; to see why farm income is so low; and to consider the elements of a sound farm policy.

FARM INCOMES ARE VERY LOW

For the past quarter-century or so, the per capita income of farm people has been about half that of people in other occupations. This estimate includes a money evaluation for the house and for the consumption of food and fuel produced on the farm.

The disparity in farm and urban incomes isn't new. Even if you go back six thousand years, farm incomes always have been

By Lauren K. Soth, Editor of the Editorial Pages of The Des Moines Register and Tribune, Des Moines, Iowa. Mr. Soth was given a Pulitzer Prize for an editorial which led to the exchange of farm delegations between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. in 1955. This article is taken from an address given to the Consultation on The Church and the Farm Problem, in November, 1958.



to the farmer?

lower than those of city folks. But during the past century or so farm people in the U.S. have begun to feel that they should live as well and have as many material advantages as city people. Farmers think that they have a right to something like parity of income with people in other occupations. Most Americans agree with this philosophy. Equality of opportunity has been an American ideal.

Two historic contributions toward equal opportunity for rural and urban people were the passage of the Homestead Act, about a century ago, which gave free land to farmers who settled on it; and the grants of land to states for the establishment of colleges of agriculture and mechanical arts.

Money isn't everything but, as John Kenneth Galbraith says in *The Affluent Society*, "Wealth is not without its advantages. And the case to the contrary, although it has often been made, has never proved widely persuasive." Farmers want more than open country living; they want money income equal to that of other people.

Poverty prevails among one half of the farmers

There is more poverty among the two million people in the lower half of the farm group than in any other segment of our society. Thousands of people live under slum conditions. The scale of living for some of the people on farms is not much better than that in the Middle East and North Africa.

The poverty of these people is a serious national problem. Many of them are Southern Negroes. They are poorly educated and have little opportunity to improve themselves without outside help. This is not only a national problem; it is also an international problem of deep world significance. As leaders of the Free World, we must take steps toward curing this cancer of poverty in agriculture. America has a "Point IV" problem at home. This is not just a farm problem, but a broad social problem which calls for education, relocation of people and industry, technical assistance and public health work. It must be considered as a separate problem from that of commercial agriculture, to which I now turn.

Low incomes for the top half of the farm group

Even the better farmers in this country are not doing very well in income according to urban standards. Per capita income of the people living on the 2,200,000 most productive farms (the top half of agriculture) was about \$5,400 in 1956. This compares with a per capita income for all non-farm people of \$6,900 in that year. Thus average income for the top half of the farm population was \$1,500 lower than the average for all other Americans.

THE PROBLEM OF INSTABILITY

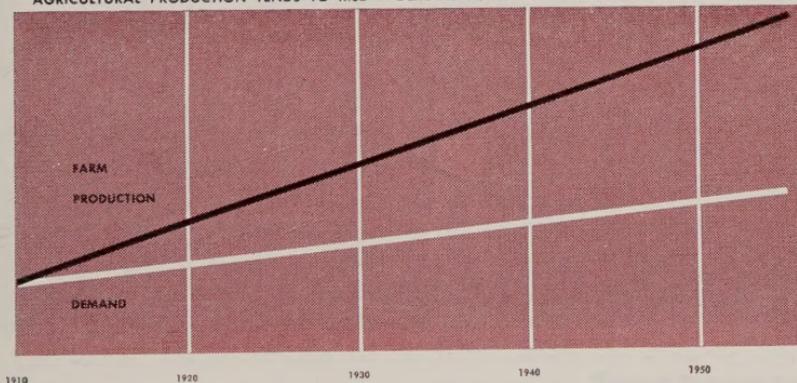
Farmers are plagued by erratic weather, cycles in livestock production, and great price fluctuation. The amount of pay a factory worker receives is fairly stable. Large industry can maintain a level price structure; but in commercial agriculture the farmer plays blind a good deal of the time. An experienced farmer who has established a strong financial position can weather the ups and downs. But a young fellow who comes into agriculture and runs into heavy debt can be wiped out by a period of price fluctuation. He may be doing a wonderful job of production and may use the very latest methods but he still faces problems of instability over which he has no control.

INELASTIC DEMAND FOR FOOD

There is a tendency for agricultural production to increase year by year, almost regardless of economic conditions, or what the Government may do to alter the situation.

The trend in the consumption of agricultural products is the reverse. As we get richer, we tend to spend proportionately less money for food. The economists call this an inelastic demand for food. As people get richer they spend more money for durable consumer goods, for entertainment, recreation, and other things; but they tend to increase their spending for food only slightly. They may eat porterhouse steak instead of hamburgers, but when people are as well fed as nearly everyone is in this country they will spend very little more for food, no matter how rich they become.

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION TENDS TO RISE — DEMAND FOR FOOD REMAINS FAIRLY "INELASTIC"



Economists say that a decrease of about five per cent in the total food supply will result in a rise in price of about twenty or twenty-five per cent. The reverse is also true: an increase of about five per cent in the total supply of food will bring a decrease of twenty or twenty-five per cent in prices.

NEW TECHNOLOGY

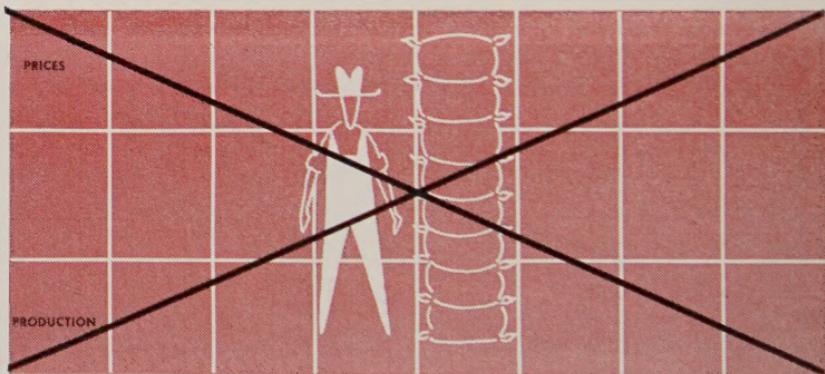
There is a continual outpouring of new technology into agriculture, which generates more production all the time. More agricultural research, more education for farm people results in increased efficiency and more production. But it also brings down the prices of agricultural products.

New technology is wonderful, of course. Efficiency in agricul-

ture is commendable, as it is in everything else. But the cost of more efficient production is being borne by farm people. City people benefit in the form of low prices and in the diversion of labor from agriculture into other lines of work. In the last twenty years approximately one-third of the workers in agriculture have gone into other work. This is a sensationaly rapid rate of adjustment, which is not widely recognized.

MOUNTING FARM SURPLUSES

Production continues to increase. Surpluses are piling up. And as surpluses increase, the prices of farm products and total farm income continue to go down. What is America to do with her tremendous stockpiles of food and fiber?



Can we eat more?

The best research indicates that in the immediate future it will be impossible for the American people to eat up the surplus food without further serious declines in prices to farmers. The supply is currently growing a little faster than the demand for food. However, the population is increasing; so sometime in the future the demand for food may equal the supply, and give the farmer decent prices for his products.

Shall we export more?

Another suggestion for reducing our stock of surplus food is to export it to those who need it. However, the demand for food is fairly inelastic in all the rich countries of the world; and the

poor countries do not have enough money to buy more food. There is little hope for increasing the commercial sale of our farm products much above present levels.

For many years we have been aware of the great paradox of starvation in a world of plenty. If private business enterprise could solve this problem, it would have done so long ago. Social action is needed to provide food for those who need it, at a price which is fair to the farmer.

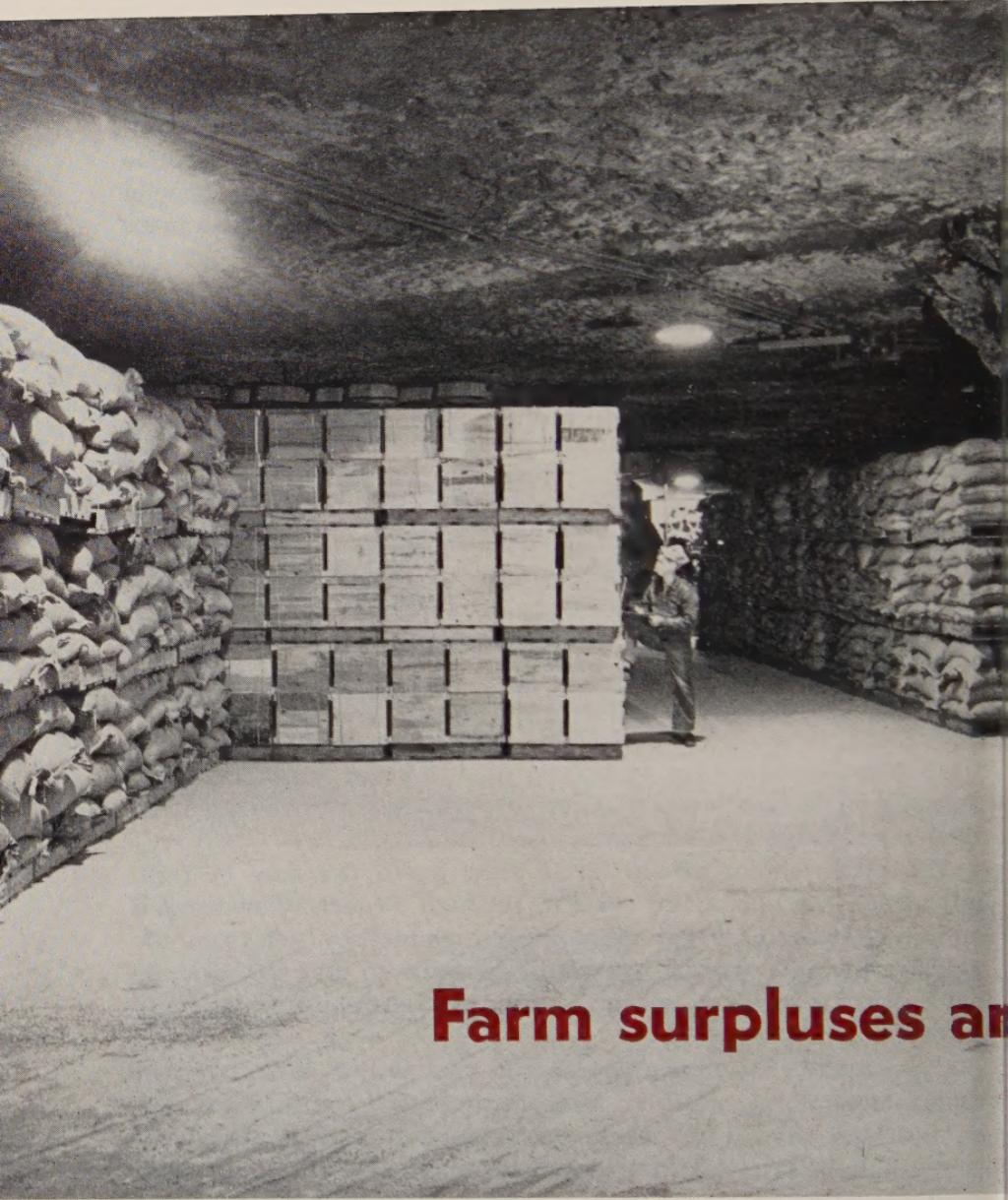
SUBSIDIES FOR AGRICULTURE

Churchmen should study the question of government aids to farmers. They should consider the heavy investment that the American community has made in agriculture during the past one hundred years: money for research; the land-grant college system; the teaching of vocational agriculture in high schools; and county agricultural agents to help farmers increase production. Having urged farmers to produce more, can we blame them now for producing too much? Is it fair to complain about subsidies for agriculture that partially reduce the disparity between farm and city incomes?

There seem to be two choices: one is to withdraw agricultural subsidies. Prices for farm products would then fall to their "natural" level, and farmers would continue to be an underprivileged segment of the population. There would be some rich farmers, but the average farm income would be low.

The other choice would be to slow down the rate of farm adjustment and to make certain, through Federal Government action, that farmers get more income than they get from the market. In other words, we would continue to give subsidies to agriculture in order to lessen the disparity between farm and city incomes.

If we make this choice, we should realize that it will not be a perfect economic solution. More farmers will continue to work on the land than might seem desirable, but agriculture would continue to be fairly attractive to newcomers. Not all of the young people in farming would leave it. Some of the best brains in the country would stay in agriculture. Adoption of this policy would provide for continued technical improvements and would maintain agriculture as a progressive, vital industry.



Farm surpluses a

Thousands of tons of surplus food are stored in this Government owned natural cooler built in an abandoned limestone mine at Atchison, Kansas.

By Walter W. Wilcox, of the Legislative Reference Service of the Library of Congress, Washington, D. C., on leave as Visiting Professor of Agricultural Economics at the University of Minnesota, St. Paul. This article is taken from Dr. Wilcox' address to the Consultation on The Church and the Farm Problem.

Farmers in the United States harvested the best crops ever in 1958 and they will receive higher incomes this year than for several years. Crop yields exceeded previous records by a good 12 per cent. National net farm income may be 15 to 20 per cent higher than last year. Land values and the capital assets of farmers continued to increase in 1958. After six years of declining national net farm income this is indeed a welcome change. But if farmers base their plans for the future on the expectation that this happy situation will continue, a rude shock awaits them.

Farmers in the first eight months of 1958 marketed 6 per cent less meat by weight than in 1957 and about 2 per cent fewer eggs. Fully half of the increase in cash income received by farmers from January to July, 1958, over a similar period in 1957 resulted from this small reduction in the marketing of meat. Two-thirds of the total increase was accounted for by the increased income from the sale of meat, poultry, and eggs. The rest of the increase is due to larger marketings of price supported cotton, food and feed crops, some of which were held over from 1957 because of unfavorable weather.

Bumper food and feed grain crops in 1958 are resulting in more rather than less income to producers, only because prices are supported at levels just slightly lower than last year. Otherwise the bountiful harvests of 1958 would have slashed prices.

United States policy

Good crops and increased farm income in 1958 were indeed an experience to be enjoyed; but it should not be taken as an indication of the future.

If the farmer is to get an adequate price for his products, the supply must more nearly balance the demand for them. In recent years, five different types of activity have been used in the attempt to reduce the surplus stocks of farm products:

- Increased efforts have been made to sell more produce at home and abroad.
- Surplus food has been donated to the school lunch program, to public institutions, and to needy persons in the U.S.A.
- Special legislation has made possible the sale of surplus food abroad in exchange for local currencies.
- Land was held out of production in 1956, 1957, and 1958 in an acreage reserve program which was authorized in 1956.
- Price supports for farm products have been lowered.

These efforts have not been successful. The amount of wheat carried over from previous years set a new record at the end of this year. All of the 900,000 producers of wheat in the United States could take a vacation for a full year and there would still be enough wheat for our domestic needs and for export.

The stock of feed grain has increased every year for the past six years. In spite of the fact that millions of acres were kept idle by the acreage reserve program, production was more excessive in 1957 and 1958 than in earlier years. The record crops of 1957 and 1958 have meant record additions to carry-over stocks. All the corn producers could take a vacation next year; yet feed supplies would be ample for hog production, dairying, and lamb fattening operations in 1959.

Cotton stocks have been reduced sharply in recent years and will be reduced slightly more in the next twelve months as a result of a record low cotton acreage in 1958. Stocks of dairy products and of several other commodities also have been reduced. But the value of farm products under loan or in Commodity Credit Corporation inventories still exceeded \$7 billion in the fall of 1958. When the loans on this year's record crops have been completed the government's investment in farm commodities may well set a new record in excess of \$8 billion.

Government costs are increasing

As might be expected, Government costs associated with storage and disposal of surpluses, and payments for the soil bank program have increased sharply in recent years. It is a shock to most people, however, to realize that these and other costs have increased to the point that appropriations and authorizations to

the Department of Agriculture for all purposes amounted to \$6,794 million for fiscal 1958 and will probably exceed \$7 billion in fiscal 1959.

Although a substantial part of this total is used to finance research and educational activities and soil and forestry conservation programs which benefit consumers even more than farmers, the largest increases in recent years have been those to finance the farm income support programs. Farm people have no assurance that the Government will continue to increase expenditures for farm programs in the future as may be necessary to maintain current programs.

1958 Agricultural Act may increase surpluses and costs

The compromise legislation passed in 1958 to free planting restrictions and permit a wider range in price support levels will probably maintain the level of farm prices and income for another year. But it will do so at the cost of increased surpluses, increased Government expenditures, and a still bigger problem of disposal of agricultural surpluses in future years.



The acreage reserve section of the Soil Bank program has ended; it held out of production about twenty million acres of cotton, corn, rice, wheat, and tobacco in 1957 and 1958. Only a modest expansion in the conservation reserve program is expected as a result of the increased rates of payments announced for 1959. Even if the weather is less favorable than in 1958, with this land released from the acreage reserve program, production will remain at or near record levels.

In addition, the cotton allotment provisions of the 1958 Act permit increases in cotton plantings which may result in crops substantially in excess of market outlets in the next two years. Various estimates place the probable excess in a range of two to five million bales a year or four to twenty million bales in the two-year period covered by the special allotment provisions.

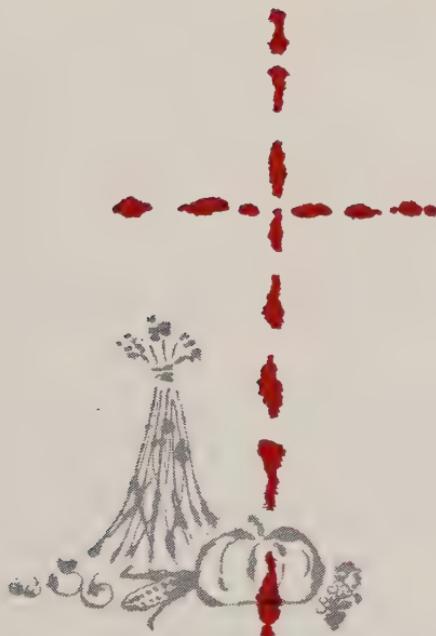
The new feed grain prices support provisions assure support prices on corn at the equivalent of \$1.10 to \$1.15 a bushel, without restrictions on acreage. This is higher than the non-compliance loan level of \$1.06 this year. Many people expect that the dropping of acreage allotments and of the acreage reserve part of the soil bank, together with an assured loan of \$1.10 to \$1.15 per bushel for corn, will result in still greater surpluses.

A solution is postponed

With more meat animals, poultry, and eggs now coming to market as a result of the change in the livestock production cycles, income from livestock already has turned down. Analysts suggest that a program of lowering prices sufficiently to liquidate the current excessive feed grain stocks and to prevent further build-ups would result in a sharp expansion in all livestock enterprises—poultry, eggs, milk, beef cattle, sheep, and hogs. Under such conditions farm prices and farm income for feed grain would fall substantially below 1956-57 levels. Corn prices would probably drop to 70 to 80 cents a bushel and hog prices to about \$10 per 100 pounds. The income prospects for cotton and wheat producers after another year or so are almost equally uninviting.

These facts and prospects indicate that the solution to the farm problem has merely been postponed. The pattern of future developments is far from clear. Whether it lies in less dependence on Government programs, freer production and sharply lower incomes, restricted production and more stable incomes, continued high-level production and more extensive distribution programs outside commercial markets, or continued high-level production with all the production moving through commercial markets and farm income supplemented by Government payments, or in some combination of these alternatives, remains to be seen.

Hard choices are still ahead. Farm leaders have learned that there is no easy, painless way to bring supplies of farm products into balance with available market outlets. The populations of the western world already are well fed. In spite of record migration of people out of agriculture, technological progress continues to expand farm output roughly twice as fast as it has been possible to expand available markets.



Christian faith speaks to the farm situation

The Christian faith is not an ethical system or a set of formulas. It is concerned with man's relation to God, and therefore, to his fellow man. In the Christian faith these two relationships are inseparable. "He who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (I John 4:20). This is true not merely because man is one of many objects of God's creation. It is because he is made in God's image. It is because of our relation to all of creation that we are concerned about the farm situation.

By Victor Obenhaus, Associate Professor of the Church in Agricultural and Industrial Life, Chicago Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois.

The farm problem is theological

There is nothing sacred about agriculture. What imparts sanctity to the vocation of farming is the purpose underlying one's engagement in it. The same values apply to the work of freight handlers, physicists, mailmen, and all other workers. This article concerns farming. The reasons for dealing with it have been made amply clear in the preceding articles. It is at the economic level that the farm situation is most urgent. Economic issues are basically spiritual and theological. Therefore, the farm problem, which involves values, is a theological problem.

Farming has often recognized the identification of man with ultimate concerns more clearly than other occupations. However, the farm problem centers in the economic realm, in the making of a living through production and distribution. Many contemporary agricultural issues are determined, in large measure, by the interpretations of the Christian faith which prevail among farmers.

City people share in the farm problem

It is also true that many of the decisions which determine agricultural life are made in urban centers. The city was the base of origin of the Congressional Acts of the 1860s which disposed of the public lands; the scientific advances which stimulated production; technological changes which altered the size of farms and the need for labor; and of the contractual farming which prevails today. Therefore, the effect of the Christian faith on the farm situation is not solely a rural concern. The faith of urban people also enters into these decisions. The strands which make up the fabric of society are so closely interwoven that they cannot be separated.

Christian faith is relevant

Christian faith has relevance for various aspects of the current farm situation. Among them are:

- The increasing dependence on technology, the machine and science.
- The role of Government in determining farm policy.

- Urbanization of the rural mind and the increasing coordination of agriculture and business.
- The reduction of decision making in new patterns of farm operation.
- The dislocation of farm people caused by changes in types of farming and the movement of farm workers.
- The imbalance of production and distribution.

What then are the inescapable aspects of the Christian faith, which confront us in the farming situation? Some of the affirmations of the Christian faith which affect agriculture are:

- Man is a part of God's creation. The entire Biblical story acclaimed that central fact, thus directing man's primary attention to him. Everything that is created owes its existence to God.
- Man owes his life and breath to his Creator. Set amidst the created world, he uses it. But *how* he uses it is important. He is charged with being a faithful steward in relation to earth, to man, and to beast.
- In the responsible relation to the earth of working, producing, sharing, men are co-laborers with God. This does not diminish God's holiness. Some persons have called man a "junior partner," but the difficulty with this concept is that it implies that man may become a senior partner if he works hard enough.
- The meaning of human existence is found in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christian faith means living in relationship to God, as we have come to understand this in the entirety of the Christ event itself. It means the new life as found in Christ, including but transcending the law. It means living under grace, doing what grace reveals, and what love requires.
- Christian faith lives in, is strengthened by, and demands community, the fellowship which reflects God's grace expressed in love. This causes all structures to be examined under the judgment of a God of love. Lacking the fullness of love's expression, Christians are under compulsion to achieve as large a measure of justice as possible. Whoever is a new creature in Christ is never satisfied with justice as the minimum condition, but he cannot settle for less.

The above affirmations constitute but the barest outline of the inseparableness of faith and farm. A concept of Christianity

which does not include nature and the processes by which man uses nature is barren, and a faith divorced from economic arrangements is warped and untrustworthy.

The truths of Christian faith may not make sense to contemporary man. A recent study reveals that neither farmers nor townspeople regard the Christian faith as much more than an instrument to sanctify current practices. It is small wonder that so-called secular people are devoid of theological understanding, when church members are so uninformed about the implications of their faith.

Work as a sacrament

Farming, as well as banking, politics, teaching, and other vocations, achieves its full meaning only in a sacramental relationship, in that one's work is dedicated to the Ultimate Being—to the Creator. The same God who gave his son in the form of man, receives as acts of consecration the ordinary work of the farmer in planting, reaping, and caring for livestock.



The Bible has a great deal to say about the farm situation. It does not necessarily deal with the problem of wetbacks, corporation farms, the soil bank, and reforestation. It is, however, concerned with justice, love, and mercy, the squeezing out of the little fellow, the use of the land, idolatrous worship of possessions and with property.

Historians may debate the importance for American political and economic life of the deism of the founding fathers. The fact remains that the responsibility of man to God and to his neigh-

bor gave a distinctive quality to American life. It is significant that, even as we were fighting an unspeakably costly war to keep the nation from being half slave and half free, we established a land-disposal policy which acknowledged the family as the cornerstone of society. The Apostle Paul was a bachelor, but even he knew that the family was elemental. The family origin was in God and it owes its identity to him (Eph. 3:14). It is the prototype for God's order. The family farm is losing its influence in American life. Here again, the decisions affecting the family are not made on the farm, but in every segment of our national life.

Economic decisions grow out of the Christian community

The most inclusive requirement of the Christian faith is exemplified in the parable of the Good Samaritan: God's love is given freely, given even to strangers. Often when one least expects it, God's love creates community. God bound men together by the most complete gift imaginable. By this act, men were bound to him and to each other in self-giving love and the new community was formed. It is what Suzanne de Dietrich has called the "Witnessing Community" in her recent book of that title. In the Old Testament, God worked through a people. In Christ a new community is called into being. This is the fellowship of the Christian faith—the Church. But the fellowship is lifeless unless it finds expression in the areas of greatest meaning to men—in their work and commerce with each other.

The term community is used in its fullest sense, being bound together by common devotion to the Ultimate Object of all Devotion. The durability of a community hinges on the validity of its ultimate devotion. The Christian faith shapes the Christian community, and there is no such thing as a Christian community without that faith. Presumably, then, the Christian brings to bear on his economic decisions the imperatives derived from fellowship in the Christian community.

The historic individualism of the American farmer has occasionally been fused into corporate action. When oppressed by injustices, he could enter into collective movements such as Shay's Rebellion, the Populist Movement, Farm Holiday, and the various agrarian movements of our own time. Rural religion has both inspired and in turn been shaped by this individualism. It

has made man sensitive to the needs of others and at times has sent men and implements to plough and plant for a disabled neighbor. Those who plough and plant and harvest in the fellowship of the Christian faith are themselves a community, entrusted with the commission to extend community. A sacramental life cannot be lived in isolation. Its very expression is communal. Rural religion is increasingly expressing this conviction, but the encrustation of historic individualism yields slowly. Increased community will come when the church sees its own fuller meaning.

The economic goals of agriculture

For a long time, the commercial farms of America have been producing an oversupply of food, in relation to the current system of distribution. Americans have concentrated for so long on industry and frugality that they are embarrassed by abundance.

Most farm programs proposed by the major farm organizations are geared to securing cash benefits for their members. Farm organizations are primarily commercial institutions. But surely there are enough farmers imbued with the Christian faith to make monetary benefits only one of the objectives of farming.

One reason why farmers are so suspicious of labor unions is that they are both doing the same thing; only labor seems to be more successful at it. While farm organizations have lost some of their former power, they provide a balance of power between big labor and big management.

Farmers are identifying themselves increasingly with management. One index of this position is the stand which a farm organization has taken on the so-called right-to-work legislation.

There are genuinely consecrated men in both agricultural and labor organizations and they exercise political power. The Christian faith has a good deal to say about power, but it does not use that term. It speaks, instead, about love of neighbor, about being one in Christ, about pride, about God's grace freely given regardless of worth. No distinction is made between farmer or laborer, between peasant in India or farmer in Iowa, between Russian or American. American farmers possess power and its use reflects their understanding of the Christian faith.

A large percentage of American rural youth have gone into industry and have carried with them the ideologies acquired in farm communities. They have not had much effect on the labor unions. The interpretation given to the Christian faith in the farm situation could influence patterns of power in other segments of our society.

Conclusion

It is the essence of our faith that God is sovereign in all of life and that we are his stewards. The fulfillment of our task can be understood and can have meaning as seen in God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ. Economic systems and personal relations are guided and judged by this standard. Farming, with all of life that has grown up around it, has the same temptations as confront other phases of life—that is, to put asunder what God has joined together. The Christian faith confronts us with a total view of life. It suggests that technology, urban-mindedness, use of power, abdication of responsibility, human suffering, and surpluses are a part of the unfinished business of the farmer and all who are related to agriculture. If there is any one vocational group uniquely situated to grasp this fact, it is composed of those who live on farms. The way we enter into the task of solving these issues will be greatly influenced by the resources of the Christian faith.

TOWN AND COUNTRY CONVOCATION

The first Town and Country Convocation of the United Church of Christ will be held at Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio, from September 1 to 3, 1959. It is hoped that five hundred laymen and clergymen will participate in it. The theme for the convocation is "The Christian Witness in the Rural Revolution." The purpose of the meeting as stated by the preliminary announcement is to analyze the social, economic, and technological revolutions which are currently sweeping across rural America; to appraise the impact of these social forces on rural people, their institutions, and ways of life; and to redefine the role of the church in the redemption of persons and the creation of the responsible society within the context of a rapidly changing rural community.

Ethical goals for agriculture

A Christian ethical approach to agriculture begins with the acknowledgement that "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. . . ." God, the Creator, has given man a special position in the world, with a specific responsibility for the fruits of the earth and towards all living things. This is the stewardship of the earth's resources for the nourishment and the enrichment of human life. Thus the production of food and fibre—the primary task of farmers—becomes a service to God and man.

In the light of basic Christian concepts, the National Council of Churches affirms certain major goals of agricultural policy and commends them to the churches and to the consciences of Christian men and women.

Development of persons

Opportunity for the full and wholesome development of persons. Poverty is often crippling to human personality. The fact that many farm families could not achieve adequate levels of productivity and income even during the decade of comparative farm prosperity following World War II makes it clear that both their situation and the national interest call for national programs designed to assist them to higher levels of living. General farm organizations, farmer cooperatives, and government should be encouraged to develop programs which will enlarge the opportunities for low-income farm families to earn adequate in-

policy



comes and achieve satisfactory levels of living, either on or off the farm, as the sound basis for wholesome personality growth.

A violation of the Christian concept of justice exists in the fact that wage workers in agriculture are denied most of the legal and economic protections long accorded to wage workers in industry. We believe that, with adaptations required for their practical application to the business of farming (as in the enactments on social security), the principles of workmen's and unemployment compensation, minimum wage laws, and the right to organize and bargain collectively under the National Labor Relations Act should be extended to wage workers in agriculture.

Rural family life

Preservation of the integrity of the farm family and the enrichment of rural family life. The Christian faith attaches special significance to the family where Christian love and forgiveness can best be personally experienced. The adequate family farm has provided, throughout our history, that type of rural environment most conducive to the growth of human personality, the stability and enrichment of family life, and the strength of the community and its institutions. This pattern of agriculture also has contributed notably to national strength and the preservation of democratic attitudes and practices. Therefore, preserva-

tion and extension of the efficient family-type farm as the predominant pattern of American agriculture should be a conscious goal of our national policy.

Cooperation among farmers

The encouragement of voluntary association, cooperation, and mutual aid among farm people. Christian tradition has always emphasized mutual aid and cooperation as practical expressions of the command to love God and neighbor. One of the finest things farmers have done has been to associate themselves together in voluntary organizations for mutual aid and cooperation. Such association should be encouraged, with the opportunity it provides for character growth through independent judgment, decision-making, responsibility-bearing, and the like. The churches should encourage full membership participation in such organizations of mutual aid and cooperation as a genuine contribution to both Christian and democratic ideals for society.

Conservation of resources

Conservation of nature's resources and their development for the legitimate uses of mankind. Conservation and wise use of the earth's resources are requirements of Christian stewardship. Such stewardship should always discipline the rights of ownership of agricultural resources. Conservation practices have to be applied ultimately by farmers on their own acres. Conservation, however, is also a national problem and requires national attention. The churches must help all people to see that each of us owes a portion of the cost of conserving the nations' soil fertility. That charge can be met most effectively through publicly encouraged and supported programs of soil conservation.

Food for all

Adequate and healthful diets for the world's growing populations. In Christian perspective the abundant agricultural production of America should be viewed as a blessing. Within sound conservation practices, and in the light of real national and world need, sustained and realistic abundance in agricultural production should be encouraged. Efficiency in production must be matched by effective distribution, to the end that all people may be fed and clothed. This requires application of imagination

and good will, both at home and abroad, through expanded programs of trade, economic aid, and programs of distribution carried on by the churches and other voluntary agencies, to break the barriers which persist between agricultural abundance and human need.

Income for farm workers

Fair and reasonably stable levels of income for farm producers. Justice demands that farmers who produce efficiently and abundantly, where such production is in the national interest, should not suffer from this fact, but should receive economic rewards comparable with those received by persons of similar competence in other vocations. Because of their ineffective bargaining position, farmers have rarely enjoyed true parity of income in the open market except during wartime periods of extreme demand. Sustained farm income is essential as a requirement both of justice for farmers and of stability for our total economy. Programs, when designed in accordance with sound economic principles and equitably administered to protect farmers against sharp fluctuations and downward trends in real income, are a legitimate and necessary function of the Federal Government.

Human interdependence

Recognition of human interdependence on a national and world scale. "We are members one of another" is a recurrent theme of Christian scripture. Every aspect of agricultural policy should be examined for its impact upon the general economy, both national and world-wide. Programs which seek to advance the interests of agriculture to the detriment of other groups or other nations should be shunned. American policy should give both moral and financial support to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and other pertinent international bodies. We should also continue our policy of gradual reciprocal lowering of tariffs, including tariffs on agricultural products, and reduction of arbitrary restrictions on international trade. Programs of technical and economic assistance to underdeveloped areas should be promoted with vigor. With our mounting agricultural productivity, we as individual Christians and as a nation carry an ever-increasing obligation to share our abundance.



Many folks all over the United States indicate interest in and concern over the problems of agriculture and farm families, but admit that they don't know much about them. There is no simple answer to the questions raised, but it is possible through reading to find out more about farm problems. No one book or publication will prove adequate, but here are several which will be useful:

Farm Trouble, by Lauren Soth.
Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, \$3.75.

In addition to being Editor of the Editorial Pages of *The Des Moines Register and Tribune* Mr. Soth has had experience as an agricultural economist both at Iowa State College and in the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This book provides background information on agricultural problems and discusses them analytically and sympathetically. The value of this book lies in its clarity and simplicity. The ordinary person not versed in the jargon of the professional economist can understand what the author is talking about. He debunks what he terms as some of the shibboleths voiced by

farm politicians and even some so-called economists.

After discussing agriculture as "a relatively sick industry as compared with the rest of this remarkably healthy economy," the author poses the real question confronting American agriculture:

How can the farming industry meet the needs of a growing population for better diets and still maintain per capita income comparable with that of the rest of the community?

He says that there is no simple answer to this question, but deals with several of the approaches we have tried—and some that we have not. He says that acreage controls have not been successful, nor have price supports to date done a good job of stabilizing farm income. He argues that a better approach would be to increase subsidies for actual soil conservation in place of parity price-fixing, crop loans and government purchases.

Among the subjects discussed are the interest of farmers in world trade, how to make the market work better, the ever-normal granary, soil conservation, and agricultural education.

Emphasis is placed on the one-

third of our farm families who live in a state of poverty, even in boom times. Mr. Soth says that this situation is a "national social cancer which an enlightened democracy cannot tolerate."

Social Responsibility in Farm Leadership, by Walter W. Wilcox. New York: Harper & Brothers, cloth, \$3.00; National Council of Churches, paper, 60¢.

This book is one of the series on the ethics and economics of society, sponsored by the NCC. The author is a distinguished agricultural economist now serving with the Legislative Reference Service of the Library of Congress.

Mr. Wilcox deals with the ethics of leadership and discusses the role of farm organizations and their leaders in establishing policies. He also discusses the role of Government. The author presents convincing arguments for interest on the part of the Church in the problems of agriculture.

Farm Prices—Myth and Reality, by Willard W. Cochrane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, \$4.00.

This book is for the individual who wants to know more about farm prices and problems after having read the books by Soth and Wilcox. The author makes some provocative suggestions regarding farm price policies.

Farmers at the Crossroads, by Ezra Taft Benson. New York: The Devin-Adair Company. \$2.50.

The Secretary of Agriculture makes a case for greater freedom for farmers in producing and marketing of their products.

Ezra Taft Benson—Man with a Mission, by Wesley McCune. Washington: Public Affairs Press, \$2.50.

This book, written by the information director of the National Farmers Union, is somewhat critical of Benson.

The Farm Problem. American Bankers Association, 12 East 36th St., New York, N. Y., free.

This pamphlet explains the problems of surplus and of farm and food production which are being increased at a greater rate than that of the growth of the population.

Other reading might include "The Farm Policy Dilemma" by Walter W. Wilcox in the August, 1958, issue of *The Journal of Farm Economics*; also the agricultural letters issued by the various Federal Reserve Banks, and particularly those of the Chicago bank, and the economic letters of the various land-grant colleges of the United States.

—J. STUART RUSSELL,
*Des Moines Register
and Tribune*

The Churches and Agricultural Policy, A Study Packet available from the Department of the Church and Economic Life of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 297 Fourth Ave., N. Y. 10, N. Y. \$1.00.

This useful study packet contains a paper-bound copy of *Social Responsibility in Farm Leadership* by Walter W. Wilcox (see above); a study guide

on the book prepared by Earl O. C. Brewer and Benson Y. Landis; *Ethical Goals for Agricultural Policy* (see pages 22 to 25); and denominational statements on agricultural policy.

Who is a Christian farmer?

This new filmstrip will soon be available from the Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, and San Francisco offices of the Bureau of Audio-Visuals of the United Church of Christ.

program planning



This issue of SOCIAL ACTION deals with one of America's most acute and least understood domestic economic issues. The "farm problem" is more than a farmers' problem. It is a problem of every American who eats food and wears clothes. Its solution is more than a farmers' responsibility; it is shared by everyone who votes.

Though the angle of approach may differ slightly, it is suggested that city and country church groups work together on the farm problem, using this issue of SOCIAL ACTION as a resource. Additional copies are available in quantity. (For rates see page 2.) A copy might be given to each participant.

One-day institute

For the rural church, composed in part of farm people, we suggest holding a one-day institute on "The Church and the Farm Problem." Such an institute may be set up by one local congregation, interdenominationally in one community, or on a county or association basis.

Two resource leaders might be secured for initial presentations —one qualified to present a sound economic analysis of the present farm situation; the other competent to discuss the bearing of the Christian faith on the farm problem. Following these presentations, there might be discussion by the whole group or by small sub-groups.

A summary session would provide opportunity for discussion of questions with the two resource leaders, who should also have a chance to discuss the issues with each other before the group.

A mimeographed brochure outlining detailed plans for such a one-day institute is available from the CCSA.

Three evening seminars

The Social Action Committee of the city church might arrange from one to three evening seminars on "Food and Farm Policy." Competent leadership is essential to guide the group.

Begin with a consideration of the city consumer's food basket and grocery bill, and move on into an analysis of payments to the middleman and finally to farm income. Related aspects of such a study will include the causes and cures of surpluses; trends in farm population and the family farm; the meaning of parity; the nature and objectives of the farm programs of the Government; and the role of farm organizations.

A topical division for three sessions might be: (a) The Present Farm Situation; (b) History of Farm Programs; and (c) Bearing of the Christian Faith on Farm Policy.

Urban-rural seminar

An even more stimulating and enlightening evening program might be had if the Social Ac-

tion Committee could arrange a joint seminar including farmer-producers and city consumers.

Invite members from one or several city churches and from one or a few neighboring country churches. Such a session might have to be held in the city for convenience, although it would be an excellent experience for the city people to drive out to a nearby country church for such a seminar.

Suggested leaders

Among the leaders who might be available for study groups in either rural or urban churches, consider the following: the county agricultural extension agent; a vocational agriculture teacher of a neighboring rural high school; professors of farm economics or rural sociology from a land-grant college; representatives of a general farm organization or cooperative.

Do not rely wholly on outside resource leaders. If you bring in only one leader he may present the bias of one farm organization, political party, or point of view. His presentation might be balanced with assigned preparatory readings. See "book reviews" (pages 26 and 27) and the statement of the National Council of Churches entitled "Ethical Goals for Agricultural Policy," on pages 22-25.

—By SHIRLEY E. GREENE,
Secretary for Town and
Country Church, Evangel-
ical and Reformed Church.



STEWARDSHIP OF THE FRUITS OF THE EARTH

Scripture

Psalm 1

Psalm 24:1-5

Matthew 7:16-21

I Corinthians 10:24-33

Hymns

We Plow the Fields and
Scatter

Come, Ye Thankful People,
Come

Praise, O Praise Our God
and King

Praise to God, Immortal
Praise

Prayers

Almighty God, whose Son didst live and work among farming folk, and whose insights have been given liberally in every age to men close to the soil, kindle anew in this generation the holy trust of those who know that a grain of wheat, dying to itself in the earth, bringeth forth fruit. May they glorify thee by loving care over the good earth and all growing things. Deepen in us our discipline to study and obey thy laws of fruitfulness, granting our souls growth in every season by the warm sun and gentle rain of thy Spirit. Amen.¹

So quicken us that by our work we may insist upon the maintenance or renewal of rural communities, on the farm and in the village; that we may achieve a right scale of values in the use of machinery and men; and that we may exult in the marriage of work with worship, with a true sense of the place of agriculture in thine overarching design for all mankind, in Christ. Amen.²

O God, by whose unchanging law the harvest follows the seedtime, and whatsoever is sown is afterward reaped; mercifully grant that we sow not such seed, that they who follow after us reap misery and shame; for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.²

Benediction

Almighty God, whose glory the heavens are telling, the earth thy power, and the sea thy might, . . . to thee belongeth glory, honour, might, greatness and magnificence now and forever, to the ages of ages, through Jesus Christ our Lord.³

¹ John Oliver Nelson, *The Student Prayerbook*, Association Press, 291 Broadway, N. Y. 7, N. Y., 1956, \$2.00.

² *Student Prayer*, Student Christian Movement Press, 1950, London.

³ *Liturgy of St. James* (4th century).

letters



We are all most enthusiastic about SOCIAL ACTION and find it absolutely invaluable in program planning.

MRS. STEPHEN ENSNER
Englewood, California

The Women's Guild of the Evangelical and Reformed Church wants to include the November issue of SOCIAL ACTION in its Reading Packets. Will you please send us 4,200 copies of the issue entitled "Human Rights: An Appraisal."

RUTH M. AUCHENBACH
Cleveland, Ohio

The American Civil Liberties Union requests permission to reprint in pamphlet form the article "Universal Rights and American Practice" by Roger N. Baldwin from the November, 1958, issue of SOCIAL ACTION.

JEFFREY E. FULLER
Assistant Director
American Civil Liberties Union

Our social action committee plans to install a rack in the Hall of Entrance of the church to display SOCIAL ACTION. Please send us details about the cost.

WILLIAM J. COMMERFORD
El Cerrito, California

Here is a money order for the renewal of my subscription to SOCIAL ACTION. I would feel lost if I missed any of its valuable issues. The October issue on "Churchman as Citizen" was helpful and timely.

MARY B. ADAMS
Van Nuys, California

The December issue on "The Population Explosion" is a gem. The whole presentation is excellent—art work, format, and last but not least the writing. All of us here have been particularly impressed also by your section on "Program Planning." I hope that we can encourage other denominations to develop similar social action programs involving Planned Parenthood.

WINFIELD BEST
Director of Public Relations
Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Inc.

I am pleased with the active interest of the United Church of Christ in the population problem, and I am enclosing a contribution of \$4,000 to further that interest. After the money has been spent, I will appreciate information on how it was used.

(Name of donor withheld)

social action calendar



- FEBRUARY** *United Church of Christ Month of Emphasis on Christian Social Action.*
- FEBRUARY 3-6** *Churchmen's Washington Seminar, Washington, D. C.*
- FEBRUARY 5-7** *Meeting of the Council for Christian Social Action, Buck Hill Falls Inn, Cresco, Penna.*
- FEBRUARY 8** *Race Relations Sunday.*
- APRIL 7-9** *United Church of Christ Washington Seminar, Washington, D. C. Fern Babcock, Leader.*
- JUNE 22-26** *West Coast Christian Social Action Institute, White Memorial Retreat Center, Mill Valley, Calif. Galen R. Weaver, Dean.*
- JUNE 23-JULY 31** *European and Middle East Travel and Study Seminar: France, Italy, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Turkey, Greece, Switzerland, and England. The Rev. and Mrs. Herman F. Reissig, Leaders. Cost: \$1640.*
- JUNE 30-JULY 11** *Sixteenth Annual Race Relations Institute, sponsored by the Division of Higher Education and the American Missionary Association, Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn. Dr. Herman H. Long, Director.*
- JULY 13-17** *Midwest Christian Social Action Institute, Lakeland College, Sheboygan, Wisc. Chester L. Marcus, Dean.*
- JULY 20-24** *Central Christian Social Action Institute, Congregational Center, Lisle, N. Y. Ray Gibbons, Dean.*
- JULY 27-31** *Eastern Christian Social Action Institute, Congregational Center, Framingham, Mass. Myron W. Fowell, Dean.*
- AUGUST 6-25** *Mexican Seminar. The Rev. and Mrs. F. Nelsen Schlegel, Leaders. Cost from Mexico City, \$295.*

For information write the Council for Christian Social Action.